

Tenderly and Fearfully Made

An Exhibition of Installation Art

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

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My work is installation based, and is formed by and incorporates a working methodology that is close to drawing. Working in the gallery space, actually building the pieces with physical lines that create linear textures in space, is the process I consider drawing. My work is simple in its parts but complex through the scale of the installation that seeks to have visual impact from a distance, and upon closer examination, intense attention to detail.

The works in this exhibition are the results of my research into line in space. I enjoy the simplicity of line and its inherent directionality. I think of drawing as a very malleable term. The definition of drawing as given in the book *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*ⁱ is:

Draw *verb* The process of mark-making, outlining, or sketching.

Drawing noun 1: A unique work, often on paper (but not necessarily so). In which the line is the key compositional element;

2: A picture that is the result of a drawing process.

I approach drawing in my construction process as mark making when building the installations in the gallery. The works are literal experiences of line in space where line is the key compositional element that occupies and changes the space within the gallery.

Urban space is saturated by lines; telephone poles, fences, streets, we are organized by line. Dan Cameron, in *Living inside the Grid*ⁱⁱ, explains modern society as an “inhabited grid”ⁱⁱⁱ in which we all exist within a system of line, direction and organization. Cameron also asserts that there has been a shift in the last decade to artwork that does not rely on the grid as a framework, as artists of geometric abstraction did, but rather discusses the grid as an inhabited space. He states that “This development, cutting through other distinctions of genre and medium, was not so much a movement as a new

approach to representation, which appeared to have grown out of profound changes in society.”^{iv}

Although I am influenced by my urban surroundings I believe that my work is inspired by a deep reverence for trees, and how their branches and roots divide space, encompassing it. I am fascinated by trees in winter, when the leaves have fallen and the branches create complex layers of line against the sky. As you move around the tree the linear ‘image’ in the branches changes, creating different configurations from other angles.

My respect for trees was also developed through an unfortunate accident I had as a young teen. Running through a group of trees in the dark, I had misjudged the distance between the ground and the lower branches. I did not duck low enough and a branch impaled itself between my right eye and my nose. It is this accident that I believe formed my interest in the violent aspect of my work, and the attraction and repulsion of the viewer.

In earlier works I also explored structure and fragility within the form as well as trying to convey tension in the physicality of the work but through predetermined shapes. This was accomplished by creating a thin sheet in a grid pattern using coils, that in its fired state would be held up by precisely placed ceramic sticks, then joined together with other grids into pod structures. Many of the grid sheets were based on the circle or the hoop because it provided as few contact points with the ground or base as possible, heightening the fragility and the tension within the work.

Currently my work has shifted toward site-specific installations. I have continued the same methodology used in my earlier sculptures, planning the work and making the

parts in my studio and then physically completing the work within the gallery space, but the installations do not have a preconceived form (such as a pod), as the earlier work did. In other words, rather than referencing architecture through pre-determined stand-alone sculptures my work now responds to the architecture of the gallery, which becomes a more integral part of the work. The grid provided the system of organization in my work prior to these installations. By moving away from grid, which gave the works their structure, I have been able to change the organizational element in the work to the gallery wall that in turn provides the structure for the installations.

The transition from discrete sized sculptures toward installation works that can only exist in a gallery space evolved through the desire to create works that were more organic in their construction and appearance. In retrospect, it makes sense that the work would develop into attaching itself to the architecture. The sculptures were primarily about structure and the physical action of building, in an attempt to reduce the sculptures to their simplest form, line. The difficulty was in how to add structure and form to create a work. I resolved to use the gallery as part of the composition and the walls as the base for my work. Another big shift was moving away from predetermined shapes, specifically the circle and the pod. This older work had a strong reference to the size and shape of the body, with most of the works being between five and seven feet long and up to two and a half feet tall. The action of weaving the circular grid was seen by a number of viewers as referring to knitting and women's traditional needle arts. I accept these connotations and in my current practice I continue to include the marks on the ceramic sticks, and in the whittled wooden sticks, as an important and deliberate action that

highlights the handmade. Installing my previous work taught me to trust my instincts and training in composition and move toward an organic creation of the work in the gallery.

When the viewer walks in to the gallery I want them to see the installations firstly, as light and airy formations, of uncertain construction and material. The works in this exhibition are very large as they activate the twelve-foot gallery walls. I want the viewer to see the complete work at a distance but as they move about the gallery and approach the work more closely, I want their physicalness to be dwarfed by the installation and their perspective changed by the wide span of the pieces. Once the viewer is pulled into the work they are confronted not with the light and airy shapes, but prickly and dangerous details. Up close the precariousness of the installation is visible, the viewer experiences a sense of discomfort or fear that they may get too close and the work will break or catch on their clothes and fall apart. The tactility of the materials and their hand-worked nature encourage the viewer to investigate and engage with the work, yet the appearance repels and forces them to recognize their own space within the gallery, highlighting their movements within the space. This push and pull effect between the overall form and the details causes the viewer to feel at once attracted and uncomfortable when looking at the works.

The architecture of the gallery space provides the structure for the work, and also defines the limit of size and shape. In Render, the University of Waterloo Gallery where this thesis exhibition takes place, I am challenged by the very high walls and the need to create pieces that interact with the space and the unique features of the room.

The installations in this show consist primarily of lines, made with either paper or clay. I use these materials in ways that are contrary to their traditional functions. When

using paper, I like the idea of taking a material that is usually a two-dimensional surface to draw on and instead using it to physically draw lines in space. In the clay works I use potters clay rolled out by hand and fired to create the lines and the structures that later will be assembled to become the works. Functional clay typically references the hand, the earth, femininity and domesticity. In my work I do not see these associations as detrimental, rather I believe that they add more layers to the work.

The making of my work takes place in stages. The first step is in the studio where I make the parts of the installations at my work table. Altering the materials, cutting the paper, rolling out the ceramic sticks is a very intimate action. Each strip of paper is cut singularly to ensure that every part is unique, similarly the tender action of the hand caressing the clay into coils^v is done individually. I do this partly out of my desire for the lines to be organic, showing evidence of the hand, but also as a exercise in labour which visually leaves time instilled within its parts.

In my work there is a definite focus on labour in the handmade quality of the works. I choose not to mechanize my process so that there is physical evidence of my presence left on the work. I also enjoy the task of making the parts, the repetitious actions and the monotony of the process can bring with it a meditative state. I also find a sense of clarity within the task of installing the work, where I am completely focused on the formation of the components, making sure that the construction is sound and visually pleasing.

My process of making is time consuming but I feel that it is necessary to add to the meaning of the work, the element of the handmade as evidence of labour and time. This stems from my training as a production potter where everything is made consistently

in large amounts, and then each is carefully altered, glazed and fired to create the simplest object. I do not think my work is about obsession in the sense of being compulsive about collecting or making. I am methodical in my work and approach the making as a task. I think of the work as an exercise in labour, the making and forming, and delicate handling of these simple objects made from simple materials. Manipulating the multiples I have laboriously made within the gallery reveals the labour involved and adds value to these simple materials. The fragility of the materials also highlights the fleetingness of my efforts and my time.

After making the parts, the second step is experimenting with what I have made. The difficulty with these works is that I can never fully see the piece until it is installed in the gallery space. After visualising the gallery space I select the area the work will occupy. In a white space, usually utilising a corner or some other area similar to the installation's site in the gallery I will assemble a test piece. During this practicing process I can foresee installation difficulties and aesthetic issues before installing in the gallery, but every installation is a learning process.

It is during the installation of the work that I feel the real creativity of the piece begins. The making of the parts is more closely related to ceramic history, the production potter, the domestic, the maker, and the multiple. The installation is about responding to the materials, space, line, creating structure, and trusting my artistic intuitive responses to the material and the architecture.

When I begin building the installations on the wall, I work the area where I think the piece will centre from in the space. I always begin very slowly scrutinizing every line that I add to the work. As I am working physically close to the wall it is difficult to

address the overall form of the work. By continuously backing away and envisioning the work complete I can decide if my original plan for the orientation of the work that was done during the visualising process is actually possible. Often it is not and the work evolves into something else, specific to that installation.

As I draw the lines in space and move forward with the installation the final image becomes clearer in my head and the highlights (points of complexity and simplicity) are then introduced. I always revisit the areas that I have finished constructing, adding and/or subtracting lines so that the piece achieves the visual balance that I require. The line placements are based in aesthetics, structure, and rules specific to each work. For example, in the work *Growth* each porcelain stick is joined to another using a thin piece of wood. Each wooden piece can only connect two ceramic sticks, they cannot be used to add more lines, their function is their purpose.

My intent is to create linear works that are visually complex yet they also have to physically exist in space. There is often a battle between what I think looks right and the limits of the materials. The works are deliberately fashioned in an organic manner, resulting in irregular constructions in contrast to the predetermined forms I made in the past. In this way I have overcome the grid, it no longer provides the physical limitations of the works, rather the installations and the space available dictate the size and the structure for the pieces.

I enjoy having complete control over the gallery space when installing the work, altering the gallery from a Modernist white cube into a different physical space. The works physically extend beyond the wall, rupturing it, prevailing over it, infesting and growing out in to the viewer's domain. In a way I also have some control over the

viewer, affecting where they move, how they move and making them aware of their body, which creates a heightened experience for the viewer.

When reinstalling the works in another space, the pieces address the same intentions of the initial works yet also change in response to the new space. Similarly, if I removed and reinstalled the same piece in the same gallery, the work would be different, because I am the variable that would be different, and the installation would therefore be installed according to my reactions, my emotions, and what I had learnt from prior installations

In this exhibition, I am trying to exploit the shadows and make them not just a by-product of the works being installed and lit, but an important visual element that I consider part of the piece. Shadows can create a single image or a series of images defining a temporal space, depending on the placement and the number of light sources. The interesting thing about shadows within a work is that they are fleeting, they are dependent on light to exist. When the light source is removed, the work is changed and or may cease to be. Man Ray in *Man*^{vi} used shadow as a tool to finish the work. In *Man*, the figurative element is an eggbeater. Using light and shadow Ray created the second leg of the man. Christian Boltanski used tiny copper figures lit by slide projectors to create his installation work *Shadows*. The figures produce giant shadows eerily dancing along the walls,^{vii} as the thin metal figures are easily blown by the fan of the projectors.

Light creates a double or opposite of the object, the first real and the other an apparition that is reliant on the real, but beautiful on its own. As Man Ray described the shadow in his work *Man*, “the shadow is as important as the real thing”^{viii} I consider the

shadows in my works as important as the physical object, as both are necessary to create the complexity of line that I want to achieve.

The fragility of the materials within my work relates to the fleetingness of the shadows cast, and I strive to create a balance between the real object and the cast shadow. Cornelia Parker uses shadows in the work *Cold Dark Matter* where she displays the remnants of an exploded garden shed restructured and suspended from the ceiling. *Cold Dark Matter* is lit from within which pushes the shadows around the entire gallery, on to the walls, floor, and ceiling. The shadows in Parker's piece represent the re-enactment of the explosion within the gallery space, the shadows display the action and reinforce the representation of the explosion. In my practice I prefer the shadows and the piece to be physically closer together resulting in a confusion between the real object and its shadow. At a distance the shadows and objects appear on a similar visual plane. This confusion is a good device to draw the viewer into the work. Upon closer investigation the real object and the shadows become apparent to the viewer.

In *Lines Drawing*, hand rolled terracotta sticks project from the wall creating a multitude of shadows. This piece uses an entire wall confronting the viewer with the work only at a distance. I used terracotta sticks in this work because when lit, the shadowed side reads as black and there is colour variation as the viewer moves along the work.

I built *Lines Drawing* using an electric drill, moving along the wall creating holes that the ceramic sticks emerge from. During the drilling I can visualize the lines as they will look emerging from the holes, by angling the drill I can change the direction of the line and shadow. Because I am working so close to the wall I can only imagine the angles

of the holes about a foot at a time, so I often back up to visualise the drawing. When the drilling is finished the wall must be sanded to remove any burs from the drywall. Then the sticks are added one by one until it is complete. Sometimes it is necessary to add a few more sticks or to fill already drilled holes if they seem out of place.

Although the decisions of placement are made intuitively I make note of my aesthetic decisions during the installation process so that upon reinstallation in another space the work responds to the same concerns. In *Lines Drawing*, the sticks must have a direction, and within the work there should not be a focus on any specific direction. For example there should be approximately equal numbers of sticks facing left as well as right, up, and down. Also there should be areas of extreme complexity of line and other parts where the wall is left empty of shadows and sticks.

Growth focuses on structure, balance, and architecture. The act of building and laborious installation is most evident in this work. The complexity of line moving further outward into the gallery space and its construction are the central aspects to the work. The piece is made from hand rolled porcelain sticks that were pierced one to five times (depending on length) and fired. I used porcelain in this work specifically because of its creamy white colour, the white on white in the gallery adds an ephemeral quality to the work making it appear lighter as though it were floating along the walls surface. This piece is made similarly to *Lines Drawing* in the process of drilling the holes and sanding the wall. After the initial sticks are placed in to the wall, using thin pieces of wood placed in the holes of the sticks they are connected to other porcelain sticks, creating the linear matrix. The porcelain sticks vary in size as do the wooden connector pieces. This helps to create density in areas and a sense of airiness in others, also it keeps the work

unpredictable. I want the viewer to be visually overwhelmed with *Growth*. The complexity of line in the ceramic pieces as well as the dark cast shadows cause a sense of confusion and the eye cannot see all the parts at once.

The paper works began as a method of approaching installation in a faster way than with the ceramic works in which the parts take a long time to create. As the experimentations continued I realised a new way of working and the paper pieces moved away from being sketches and into installations. Working with the paper versus working with the ceramic parts is interesting because the flexibility and malleability of the material is very different resulting in works that still focus on line but in different ways.

Frank Stella's three dimensional paintings which extend off the wall into the gallery space, were the inspiration for *Black and White Drawing*, which uses Stonehenge paper cut into strips with the addition of a single line of black electrical tape to each strip. I use Stonehenge paper particularly as it does not have a distinct grain and because of its heavy weight it will withstand and hold the manipulations. Cutting the paper has its own particular ritual so that every piece is unique and organic in its shape. I hold the paper in the air and slice down its length with a sharp knife. The shiny tape contrast with the matte paper and its straight width highlights the variations in the sizes of the paper that have been hand cut. I pin the paper to the wall using thumbtacks. I believe that this reinforces the idea of the paper, emphasizing the material and the work made with it as transferable and transformable. The paper is layered and twisted to create an under structure to support the final layer, the outermost strips of paper with which I play with the direction of the line and the choice between the white side of the paper and the black taped side.

Black and White Drawing differs from the other work in the exhibition because it does not have their element of physical danger. In addition the paper displays gravity more than the other works do, sagging in areas, where the other works in the show seem to defy gravity.

The second paper work in this show called *A Simple Twist* displays more of a connection with the ceramic pieces within this exhibition. Wooden sticks with sharpened points protrude from the wall at ninety-degree angles. The paper is cut thinly with varying widths, and the ends of the strips are cut in to points. The pieces of white paper are twisted once and then pierced by the sticks in order to hold their form. *A Simple Twist* upon first approach seems celebratory in the papers twists and turns, while upon further visual investigation the work takes on a spiky appearance due to the wooden sticks and the tapered ends of the paper. The shadows in this work multiply the lines and add to the visual impact of the work.

I began the MFA as a sculptor from a craft background. Over the past two years this program has encouraged an evolution in my work that I could not foresee occurring if I had not switched my focus to fine arts. The installations in this show are the results of my investigations into line in space. I am creating work that is attached to and comments on architecture, that highlights the touch of the artist and the interaction between maker and material that satisfies my craft and fine art perspectives. The incorporation of drawing into my work has given me the freedom to create linear works using clay and paper, in which line is the key compositional element. As I do not feel yet that I have come to any concrete conclusions in my research, I plan to continue exploring the

processes and working methods that I have developed in order to add to the ongoing dialogue between art, craft and installation.



Plate 1
Lines Drawing, 2007
32 x 12 feet
Terracotta

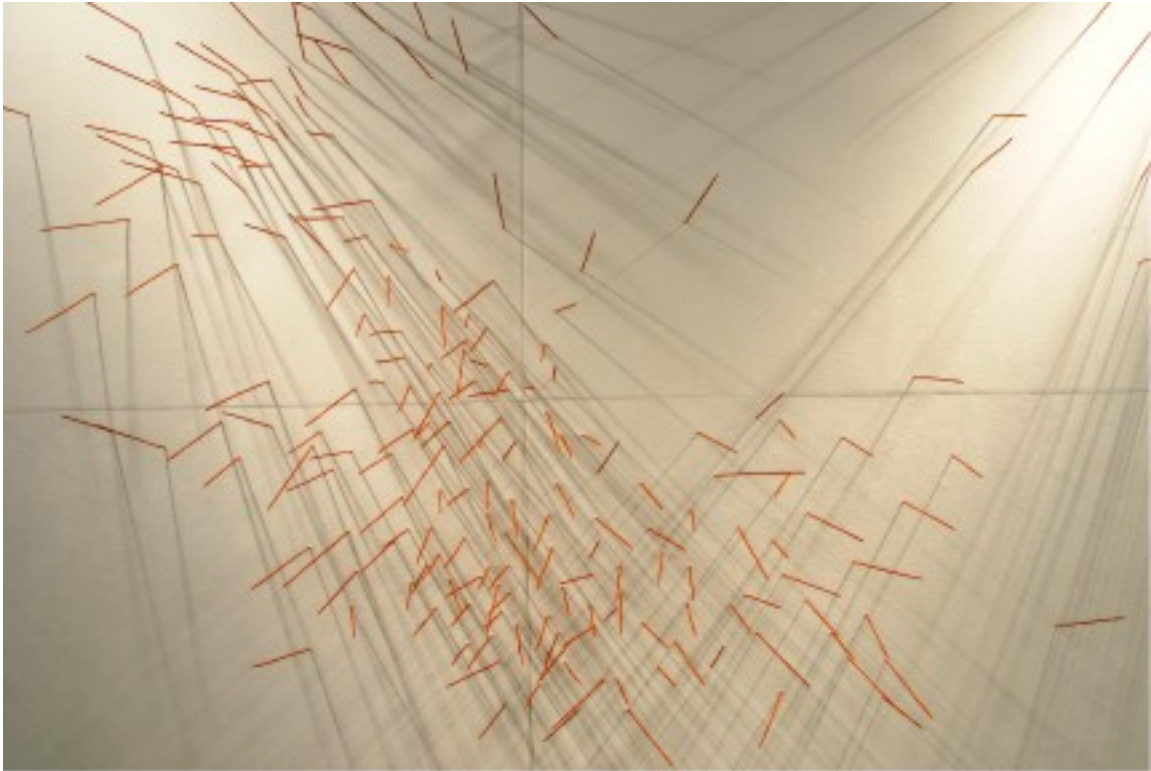


Plate 2

Lines Drawing (detail), 2007

32 x 12 feet

Terracotta



Plate 3

Lines Drawing (detail), 2007

32 x 12 feet

Terracotta



Plate 4
Growth, 2007
32 x 12 feet
Porcelain and wood



Plate 5
Growth (detail), 2007
32 x 12 feet
Porcelain and wood

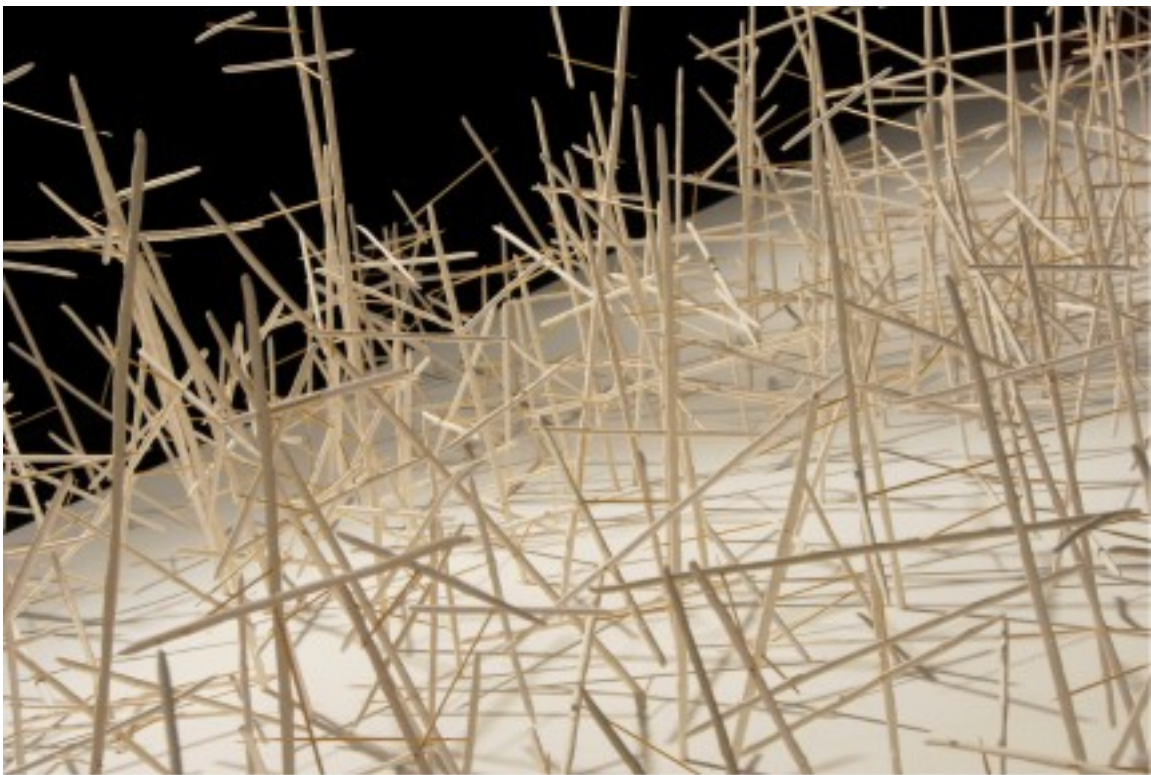


Plate 6

Growth (detail), 2007

32 x 12 feet

Porcelain and wood



Plate 7

Black and White Drawing, 2007

13 x 10 feet

Paper, electrical tape, thumb tacks



Plate 8

Black and White Drawing (detail), 2007

13 x 10 feet

Paper, electrical tape, thumb tacks



Plate 9

A Simple Twist, 2007

29 x 12 feet

Paper and wood



Plate 10

A Simple Twist (detail), 2007

29 x 12 feet

Paper and wood



Plate 11
Installation View

Endnotes

¹ Dexter, Emma. Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing. Phaidon Press Limited, New York, 2005, pg. 362.

¹ Cameron, Dan. Living Inside the Grid. New Museum of Contemporary Art Press, New York, 2003, pg. 12.

¹ Cameron, Dan. Living Inside the Grid. New Museum of Contemporary Art Press, New York, 2003, pg. 12.

¹ Cameron, Dan. Living Inside the Grid. New Museum of Contemporary Art Press, New York, 2003, pg. 11.

¹ Coiling, is a ceramic term for a method of hand building in which the artist rolls out long strings of clay and builds up a object by adding layers of coils and then smoothing them together.

¹ Stoichita, Victor. A Short History of the Shadow. Reaking Books Ltd, 1997, pg. 194.

¹ Stoichita, Victor. A Short History of the Shadow. Reaking Books Ltd, 1997, pg. 201.

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